Diagnosis and Treatment of Headache
Diagnosis Algorithm

10
Patient presents with complaint of a headache
AD

11
Critical first steps:
- Detailed history
- Focused physical examination
- Focused neurological examination
AD

11
Detailed History
- Characteristics of the headache
- Assess functional impairment
- Past medical history
- Family history of migraines
- Current medications (Rx and over-the-counter)
- Social history
- Review of systems - to rule out systemic illness

12
Causes for concern:
- Subacute and / or progressive headache over months
- New or different headache
- "Worst headache ever"
- Any headache of maximum severity at onset
- Onset after the age of 50 years old
- Symptoms of systemic illness
- Seizures
- Any neurological signs

12
Causes for concern?
AD
yes →
no ↓

13
Consider secondary headache disorder
A

14
Meets criteria for primary headache disorder?
AD
no →
yes ↓

15
Headaches other than primary headache
Out of guideline

21
Specialty consultation indicated?
A
yes →
no ↓

24
Refer to headache specialist

22
Perform diagnostic testing if indicated
AD

25
Diagnosis of primary headache confirmed?
yes →
no ↓

23
Findings consistent with secondary headache?
A
no ←
yes →

26
Determine secondary headache type
Out of guideline

16
Evaluate type of primary headache
Initiate patient education and lifestyle management
AD

17
Migraine
(See Migraine algorithm)

18
Tension-type
(See Tension-type algorithm)

19
Cluster
(See Cluster algorithm)

20
Others
Out of guideline

A = Annotation
D = Discussion

16
Sinus Headache

Migraine-associated symptoms are often misdiagnosed as "sinus headache" by patients and providers. This has led to the underdiagnosis and treatment of migraine.

The International Headache Society (IHS) defines sinus headache by purulent nasal discharge, pathologic sinus finding by imaging, simultaneous onset of headache and sinusitis, and headache localized to specific facial and cranial areas of the sinuses.